Reincarnations

James Stephens

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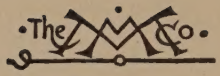

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C. 1

REINCARNATIONS

BY

JAMES STEPHENS

AUTHOR OF "THE HILL OF VISION"
"THE CROCK OF GOLD," ETC.

6999

New York
THE MACMILLAN COMPANY
1918

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Set up and electrotyped. Published April, 1918.

TO

ALICE STOPFORD GREEN

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REINCARNATIONS

GEOFFREY KEATING

O WOMAN full of wiliness!
Although for love of me you pine,
Withhold your hand adventurous,
It holdeth nothing holding mine.

Look on my head, how it is grey!
My body's weakness doth appear;
My blood is chill and thin; my day
Is done, and there is nothing here.

Do not call me a foolish man,
Nor lean your lovely cheek to mine:
O slender witch, our bodies can
Not mingle now, nor any time.

So take your mouth from mine, your hand
From mine, ah, take your lips away!
Lest heat to will should ripen, and
All this be grave that had been gay.

It is this curl, a silken nest,
And this grey eye bright as the dew,
And this round, lovely, snow-white breast
That draws desire in search of you.

I would do all for you, meseems,
But this, tho' this were happiness!
I shall not mingle in your dreams,
O woman full of wiliness!

MARY HYNES

She is the sky of the sun,
She is the dart
Of love,
She is the love of my heart,
She is a rune,
She is above
The women of the race of Eve
As the sun is above the moon.

Lovely and airy the view from the hill
That looks down Ballylea;
But no good sight is good until
By great good luck you see
The Blossom of the Branches walking
towards you
Airily.

THE COOLUN

Come with me, under my coat,
  And we will drink our fill
Of the milk of the white goat,
  Or wine if it be thy will;
  And we will talk until
Talk is a trouble, too,
  Out on the side of the hill,
And nothing is left to do,
  But an eye to look into an eye
And a hand in a hand to slip,
  And a sigh to answer a sigh,
And a lip to find out a lip:
  What if the night be black
And the air on the mountain chill,
  Where the goat lies down in her track

And all but the fern is still!
  Stay with me, under my coat,
And we will drink our fill
  Of the milk of the white goat
Out on the side of the hill.

PEGGY MITCHELL

As lily grows up easily,
In modest, gentle dignity
To sweet perfection,
So grew she,
As easily.

Or as the rose that takes no care
Will open out on sunny air
Bloom after bloom, fair after fair,
Sweet after sweet;
Just so did she,
As carelessly.

She is our torment without end,
She is our enemy and friend,
Our joy, our woe;

And she will send
Madness or glee
To you and me,
And endlessly.

NANCY WALSH

I, WITHOUT bite or sup,
  If thou wert fated for me,
I would up
  And would go after thee
Through mountains.

A thousand thanks from me
  To God have gone,
Because I have not lost my senses
    to thee,
Though it was hardly I escaped from
    thee,
  O ringleted one!

THE RED MAN'S WIFE

Then she arose
And walked in the valley
In her fine clothes.

After great fire
Great frost
Comes following.

Turgesius was lost
By the daughter of Maelsheachlin
The King.

By Grainne,
Of high Ben Gulbain in the north,
Was Diarmuid lost.

The strong sons of Ushna,
Who never submitted,
They fell by Deirdre.

NANCY WALSH

It is not on her gown
She fears to tread;
It is her hair
Which tumbles down
And strays
About her ways
That she must care.

And she lives nigh this place:
The dead would rise
If they could see her face;
The dead would rise
Only to hear her sing:
But death is blind, and gives not ear
nor eye
To anything.

We would leave behind
Both wife and child,
And house and home;
And wander blind,
And wander thus,
And ever roam,
If she would come to us
In Erris.

Softly she said to me —
Be patient till the night comes,
And I will go with thee.

ANTHONY O'DALY

Since your limbs were laid out
  The stars do not shine,
The fish leap not out
  In the waves.
On our meadows the dew
  Does not fall in the morn,
For O'Daly is dead:
  Not a flower can be born,
Not a word can be said,
  Not a tree have a leaf;
Anthony, after you
There is nothing to do,
  There is nothing but grief.

MARY RUANE

The sky-like girl whom we knew!
  She dressed herself to go to the fair
In a dress of white and blue;
A white lace cap, and ribbons white
  She wore in her hair;
She does not hear in the night
Her mother crying for her,
  Where,
    Deep down in the sea,
She rolls and lingers to and fro
    Unweariedly.

WILLIAM O'KELLY

The Protecting Tree
  Of the men of the land of Fál!
What aileth thee,
  And why is it that all
About thee grieves?

Alas, O Tree of the Leaves!
  Here is thy rhyme:
Thy bloom is lightened;
And if thy fruit be withered
Thy root hath not tightened
  At the same time.

Not since the Gael was sold
At Aughrim. Not since to cold,

Dull death went Owen Roe;
Not since the drowning of Clann Adam
in the days of Noe
Brought men to hush,
Has such a tale of woe come to us
In such a rush.

The true flower of the blood of the
place is fallen:
The true clean-wheat of the Gael is
reaped.

Destruction be upon Death,
For he has come and taken from our
tree
The topmost blackberry!

SEAN O'COSGAIR

Pity it was that you should ever stand
In ship or boat,
Or that you went afloat
Inside that ship!

The lusty steps you took!
The ways and journeys you knew how to wend
From London back to Beltra,
And this end!

You who could swim so well!
What time you sported in the lifting tides
The girls swam out to you, and held your sides

When they were weary, for they knew
they were
Safe, because you were there.

Your little-mother thought that this
was true
(And so she made no stir
Till you were found),
Although an hundred might be
drownéd, you
Would come back safe to her,
And not be drowned!

THE COUNTY MAYO

Now with the coming in of the spring
the days will stretch a bit,
And after the Feast of Brigid I shall
hoist my flag and go,
For since the thought got into my
head I can neither stand nor sit
Until I find myself in the middle of
the County of Mayo.

In Claremorris I would stop a night
and sleep with decent men,
And then go on to Balla just beyond
and drink galore,
And next to Kiltimagh for a visit of
about a month, and then
I would only be a couple of miles
away from Ballymore.

I say and swear my heart lifts up like
the lifting of a tide,
Rising up like the rising wind till fog
or mist must go,
When I remember Carra and Gallen
close beside,
And the Gap of the Two Bushes, and
the wide plains of Mayo.

To Killaden then, to the place where
everything grows that is best,
There are raspberries there and straw-
berries there and all that is good
for men;
And if I were only there in the middle
of my folk my heart could rest,
For age itself would leave me there
and I'd be young again.

EILEEN, DIARMUID AND TEIG

Be kind unto these three, O King!
For they were fragrant-skinned, cheerful and giving;
Three stainless pearls, three of mild, winning ways,
Three candles sending forth three pleasant rays,
Three vines, three doves, three apples from a bough,
Three graces in a house, three who refused nohow
Help to the needy, three of slenderness,
Three memories for the companionless,
Three strings of music, three deep holes in clay,
Three lovely children who loved Christ alway,

Three mouths, three hearts, three minds beneath a stone;
Ruin it is! three causes for the moan
That rises everywhere now they are gone:
Be kind, O King, unto this two and one!

HONORO BUTLER AND LORD KENMARE (1720)

In bloom and bud the bees are busily
  Storing against the winter their sweet hoard
That shall be rifled ere the autumn be
  Past, or the winter comes with silver sword
To fright the bees, until the merry round
Tells them that sweets again are to be found.

The lusty tide is flowing by in ease,
  Telling of joy along its brimming way;
Far in its waters is an isle of trees

Whereto the sun will go at end of day,
As who in secret place and dear is hid,
And scarce can rouse him thence tho' he be chid.

Now justice comes all trouble to repair,
And cheeks that had been wan are coloured well,
The untilled moor is comely, and the air
Hath a great round of song from bird in dell,
And bird on wing and bird on forest tree,
And from each place and space where bird may be

The languid are made strong, the strong grow stronger,
There is no grievance here, and no distress,

The woeful are not woeful any longer,
The rose hath put on her a finer dress,
And every girl to bloom adds bloom again,
And every man hath heart beyond all men.

For the Star of Munster, Pearl of the Golden Bough,
Comes joyfully this day of days to wed
Her choice of all whom fame hath loved till now,
And who chose her from all that love instead:
The Joy of the Flock, the Bud of the Branch is she,
Crown of the Irish Pride and Chivalry.

He is a chief and prince, well famed is he,

The love of thousands unto him
does run;
And all days were before and all
will be,
He was and will be loved by every
one;
And she and he be loved by all no less
Who courage love, and love, and
loveliness.

The nobles of the province take their
wine,
And drink a merry health to groom
and bride;
They shall be drunken ere the sun
decline,
And all their merrymaking lay
aside
In deep, sweet sleep that seals a
merry day
Until the dawn, when they shall ride
away,

Leaving those two who now are one
behind.
O Moon! pour on the silence all
thy beams,
And for this night be beautiful and
kind;
Weave in their sleep thy best and
dearest dreams;
And fortune them in their own land
to be
Safe from all evil chance, and from
all enmity.

CLANN CARTIE

My heart is withered and my health
is gone,
For they who were not easy put upon,
Masters of mirth and of fair clemency,
Masters of wealth and gentle charity,
They are all gone. Mac Caura Mór
is dead,
Mac Caura of the Lee is finishéd,
Mac Caura of Kanturk joined clay to
clay
And gat him gone, and bides as deep
as they.

Their years, their gentle deeds, their
flags are furled,
And deeply down, under the stiffened
world,

In chests of oaken wood are princes thrust,
To crumble day by day into the dust
A mouth might puff at; nor is left a trace
Of those who did of grace all that was grace.

O Wave of Cliona, cease thy bellowing!
And let mine ears forget a while to ring
At thy long, lamentable misery:
The great are dead indeed, the great are dead;
And I, in little time, will stoop my head
And put it under, and will be forgot
With them, and be with them, and thus be not:
Ease thee, cease thy long keening, cry no more:
End is, and here is end, and end is sore,

And to all lamentation be there end:
If I might come on thee, O howling
friend!
Knowing that sails were drumming
on the sea
Westward to Eiré, and that help
would be
Trampling for her upon a Spanish
deck,
I'd ram thy lamentation down thy
neck.

THE LAND OF FÁL

If all must suffer equally, and pay
In equal share for that sin wrought by Eve,
O Thou, if Thou wilt deign to answer, say:
Why are the poor tormented? why made grieve
The innocent? why are the free enslaved?
Why have the wicked peace tho' void of ruth?
Why are there none to pity, when, dismayed,
And sick with fear, the lamb bleats to the tooth
That tears him down? why is the cry unheard

Of lonely anguish? why, when the land of Fál
Had loved Thee long and well, was she not spared
The ruin that hath stamped her under all
That mourn and die?

INIS FÁL

Now may we turn aside and dry our tears,
And comfort us, and lay aside our fears,
For all is gone — all comely quality,
All gentleness and hospitality,
All courtesy and merriment is gone;
Our virtues all are withered every one,
Our music vanished and our skill to sing:
Now may we quiet us and quit our moan,
Nothing is whole that could be broke; no thing
Remains to us of all that was our own.

OWEN O'NÉILL

If poesy have truth at all,
  If some great lion of the Gael
Shall rule the lovely land of Fál;
  O yellow mast and roaring sail!
Carry the leadership for me,
Writ in this letter, o'er the sea
  To great O'Néill.

EGAN O'RAHILLY

HERE in a distant place I hold my tongue;
I am O'Rahilly:
When I was young,
Who now am young no more,
I did not eat things picked up from the shore.

The periwinkle, and the tough dog-fish
At even-time have got into my dish!
The great, where are they now! the great had said —
This is not seemly, bring to him instead

That which serves his and serves our
dignity —
And that was done.

I am O'Rahilly:
Here in a distant place I hold my
tongue,
Who once said all his say, when he
was young!

RIGHTEOUS ANGER

The lanky hank of a she in the inn over there
Nearly killed me for asking the loan of a glass of beer:
May the devil grip the whey-faced slut by the hair,
And beat bad manners out of her skin for a year.

That parboiled imp, with the hardest jaw you will see
On virtue's path, and a voice that would rasp the dead,
Came roaring and raging the minute she looked at me,
And threw me out of the house on the back of my head!

If I asked her master he'd give me a
cask a day;
But she, with the beer at hand, not a
gill would arrange!
May she marry a ghost and bear him
a kitten, and may
The High King of Glory permit her
to get the mange.

THE WEAVERS

Many a time your father gave me aid
When I was down, and now I'm down again:
You mustn't take it bad or be dismayed
Because I say, young folk should help old men
And 'tis their duty to do that: Amen!

I have no cows, no sheep, no cloak, no hat,
For those who used to give me things are dead
And my luck died with them: because of that

I won't pay you a farthing, but, instead,
I'll owe you till the dead rise from the dead.

A farthing! that's not much, but, all the same,
I haven't half a farthing, for that grand
Big idiot called Fortune rigged the game
And gave me nothing, while she filled the hand
Of every stingy devil in the land.

You weave, and I: you shirts: I weave instead
My careful verse — but you get paid at times!
The only rap I get is on my head:
But should it come again that men like rhymes
And pay for them, I'll pay you for your shirt.

ODELL

My mind is sad and weary thinking how
The griffins of the Gael went over the sea
From noble Eiré, and are fighting now
In France and Flanders and in Germany.

If they, 'mid whom I sported without dread,
Were home I would not mind what foe might do,
Or fear tax-man Odell would seize my bed
To pay the hearth-rate that is overdue.

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I pray to Him who, in the haughty hour
Of Babel, threw confusion on each tongue,
That I may see our princes back in power,
And see Odell, the tax-collector, hung.

THE APOLOGY

Do not be distant with me, do not be
  Angry because I drank deep of
    your wine,
But treat that laughing matter laugh-
    ingly
  Because I am a poet, and incline
By nature and by art to jollity.

Always I loved to see, I will aver,
  The good red tide lip at the flagon's
    brim,
Sitting half fool and half philosopher,
  Chatting with every kind of her
    and him,
And shrugged at sneer of money-
    gatherer.

Often enough I trudge by hedge and
wall,
Too often there's no money in my
purse,
Nor malice in my mind ever at all,
And for my songs no person is the
worse
But I who give all of my store to all.

If busybody spoke to you of it,
Say, kindly man, if kindly man do
live:
The poet only takes his sup and bit,
And say: It is no great return to
give
For his unstinted gift of verse and wit.

THE GANG

Our fathers must have sinned: we pay for it!
Through them the base-born tribe that sold their king
Sneaked into power, and in high places sit,
And do their will and wish in everything;
For they may rob and kill, grieve and disgrace
All who are left alive of Eiver's race.

They seized with daring guile on rank and pelf,
And swore that they would never bend a knee
Unto the king: they robbed the Church herself:

They stole our princes' lands, and o'er the sea
They packed those princes, or drove them away
To barren rocks and fields that have no clay.

That spawn of base mechanics! who could ne'er,
Though Doomsday came, by any art be made
Noble, are noble now, and have no care:
Snugly they sit and safe and unafraid
In stately places, proud as if the mud
And slime that swills their veins were princes' blood.

Let us be wise and wary of that gang!
When they seem friendly know they have much wit,

And if it come that any man shall hang
This neck will go unchoked, that nose unslit,
For, be things wry and crooked and to guess,
Those twisters are at home in twistiness.

We know now what their plottings were about,
And how they planned, and what they meant to win;
'Twas God, not us, that took their tangles out,
For no sleek eel inside an oily skin
Could slip with more address from harm than they
Can slip from punishment and get away.

When trouble came it was their plan to get

Our friends into the boat they meant to leave,
And there was some one left to pay their debt,
And they were free again to lie and thieve:
So they could put the feet of the man they'd rob
Into the boots of the one that did the job.

If burnt child does truly dread the flame,
If wounded soldier shrinks again to see
A steel point sloping to him, let the same
Experience teach our chiefs that they may be
Crafty in meeting craft, and may beware
Of brewer's bees and buzzers everywhere.

Unto the Mind which pardons sin I pray,
I pray to Him who did permit our woe
But halted our destruction, that to-day
Kindness and love and trust and inward glow
Of vision light our hearts with light divine,
So that we know our way until the end of time.

THE GERALDINE'S CLOAK

I WILL not heed the message which you bring:
That lovely lady gave her cloak to us,
And who'd believe she'd give away a thing
And ask it back again? — 'tis fabulous!

My parting from her gave me cause to grieve,
For she, that I was poor, had misty eyes;
If some Archangel blew it I'd believe
The message which you bring, not otherwise.

I do not say this just to make a joke,
Nor would I rob her, but, 'tis verity,
So long as I could swagger in a cloak
I never cared how bad my luck could be.

That lady, all perfection, knows the sting
Of poverty was thrust deep into me:
I don't believe she'd do this kind of thing,
Or treat a poet less than daintily.

SKIM-MILK

A SMALL part only of my grief I write;
And if I do not give you all the tale
It is because my gloom gets some respite
By just a small bewailing: I bewail
That I with sly and stupid folk must bide
Who steal my food and ruin my inside.

Once I had books, each book beyond compare,
But now no book at all is left to me,
And I am spied and peeped on everywhere,

And my old head, stuffed with latinity,
And with the poet's load of grave and gay
Will not get me skim-milk for half a day.

Wild horse or quiet, not a horse have I,
But to the forest every day I go
Bending beneath a load of wood, that high!
Which raises on my back a sorry row
Of raw, red blisters; so I cry, alack,
The rider that rides me will break my back.

Ossian, when he was old and near his end,
Met Patrick by good luck, and he was stayed;
I am a poet too and seek a friend,
A prop, a staff, a comforter, an aid,

A Patrick who will lift me from despair,
In Cormac Uasal Mac Donagh of the golden hair.

BLUE BLOOD

We thought at first, this man is a
king for sure,
Or the branch of a mighty and ancient
and famous lineage —
That silly, sulky, illiterate, black-
avised boor
Who was hatched by foreign vulgarity
under a hedge.

The good men of Clare were drinking
his health in a flood,
And gazing with me in awe at the
princely lad,
And asking each other from what
bluest blueness of blood
His daddy was squeezed, and the pa
of the da of his dad?

We waited there, gaping and wondering, anxiously,
Until he'd stop eating and let the glad tidings out,
And the slack-jawed booby proved to the hilt that he
Was lout, son of lout, by old lout, and was da to a lout!

O'BRUAIDAR

I WILL sing no more songs: the pride
of my country I sang
Through forty long years of good
rhyme, without any avail;
And no one cared even as much as
the half of a hang
For the song or the singer, so here
is an end to the tale.

If a person should think I complain
and have not got the cause,
Let him bring his eyes here and
take a good look at my hand,
Let him say if a goose-quill has cal-
loused this poor pair of paws
Or the spade that I grip on and
dig with out there in the land?

When the great ones were safe and
renowned and were rooted and
tough,
Though my mind went to them and
took joy in the fortune of those,
And pride in their pride and their
fame, they gave little enough,
Not as much as two boots for my
feet, or an old suit of clothes.

I ask of the Craftsman that fashioned
the fly and the bird,
Of the Champion whose passion will
lift me from death in a time,
Of the Spirit that melts icy hearts
with the wind of a word,
That my people be worthy, and get,
better singing than mine.

I had hoped to live decent, when
Ireland was quit of her care,
As a bailiff or steward perhaps in
a house of degree,

But my end of the tale is, old brogues
and old britches to wear,
So I'll sing no more songs for the
men that care nothing for me.

NOTE

This book ought to be called Loot or Plunder or Pieces of Eight or Treasure-Trove, or some name which would indicate and get away from its source, for although everything in it can be referred to the Irish of from one hundred to three hundred years ago the word translation would be a misdescription. There are really only two translations in it, Keating's "O Woman full of Wiliness" and Raftery's "County Mayo." Some of the poems owe no more than a phrase, a line, half a line, to the Irish, and around these scraps I have blown a bubble of verse and made my poem. In other cases, where the matter of the

poem is almost entirely taken from the Irish, I have yet followed my own instinct in the arrangement of it, and the result might be called new poems.

My first idea was to make an anthology of people whom long ago our poets had praised, so that, in another language and another time, these honoured names might be heard again, even though in my own terms and not in the historic context. I did not pursue this course, for I could not control the material which came to me and which took no heed of my plan and was just as interesting. It would, therefore, be a mistake to consider that these verses are representative of the poets by whom they are inspired. In the case of David O'Bruadair this is less true than in any of the others, but, even in his case, although I have often conveyed his matter almost verbatim, the selection is not representative of the poet. One side only, and that the

least, is shown, for a greater pen than mine would be necessary if that tornado of rage, eloquence, and humour were to be presented; but the poems which I give might almost be taken as translations of one side of his terrific muse.

As regards Egan O'Rahilly a similar remark is necessary. No pen and no language but his own could even distantly indicate a skill and melody which might be spoken of as one of the wonders of the world. I have done exactly as I pleased with his material.

From Antoine O'Raftery I have taken more than from any of the others, and have in nearly every instance treated his matter so familiarly that a lover of Raftery (and who, having read a verse of his, does not love him?) might not know I was indebted to this poet for my songs. His work is different from that of Keating, O'Rahilly, or O'Bruadair, for

these were learned men, and were writing out of a tradition so hoary with age and so complicated in convention that only learned and subtle minds could attempt it. I have wondered would Keating or O'Rahilly have been very scornful of Raftery's work? I think they might have been angry at such an ignorance of all the rules, and would probably have torn the paper on which his poems were written, and sat down to compose a satire which would have raised blisters on that poor, blind, wandering singer, the master of them all.

In two of the poems which I tried to translate from Raftery I have completely failed. Against one of them I broke an hundred pens in vain; and in the other, "The County Mayo," I have been so close to success and so far from succeeding that I may mourn a little about it. The first three verses are not bad, but the last verse is the completest miss: the simplicity of the

original is there, its music is not, and in the last two lines the poignance, which should come on the reader as though a hand gripped at his heart, is absent. The other failure I have not printed because I could get no way on it at all: it would not even begin to translate. This is Raftery's reply to the man who did not recognise him as he fiddled to a crowd, and asked "who is the musician?"

I am Raftery the poet,
Full of hope and love,
My eyes without sight,
My mind without torment,

Going west on my journey
By the light of my heart,
Tired and weary
To the end of the road.

Behold me now
With my back to a wall,
Playing music
To empty pockets.

See Douglas Hyde's *Life of Raftery*.

Dissimilar as these poets are from each other in time, education, and

temperament, they are alike in that they were all poor men, so poor that there was often little difference between them and beggars. They all sing of their poverty: Keating as a fact to be recorded among other facts, O'Rahilly in a very stately and bitter complaint, and Raftery as in the quotation above; but O'Bruadair lets out of him an unending, rebellious bawl which would be the most desolating utterance ever made by man if it was not also the most gleeful.

THE END

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The Insurrection in Dublin

By JAMES STEPHENS

Author of "The Crock of Gold,"
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These passages show the spirit of Mr. Stephens' book. Of the writing of the book itself he says:

"The day before the rising was Easter Sunday, and they were crying joyfully in the churches, 'Christ has risen.' On the following day they were saying in the streets, 'Ireland has risen.' The luck of the moment was with her. The auguries were good, and, notwithstanding all that has succeeded, I do not believe she must take to the earth again, nor be ever again buried. The pages hereafter were written day by day during the Insurrection that followed Holy Week. . . . What I have written is no more than a statement of what passed in one quarter of our city, and a gathering together of the rumor and tension which for nearly two weeks had to serve the Dublin people in lieu of news. It had to serve many Dublin people in place of bread."

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